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# BELGIAN MUSIC

*by*

CHARLES LEIRENS

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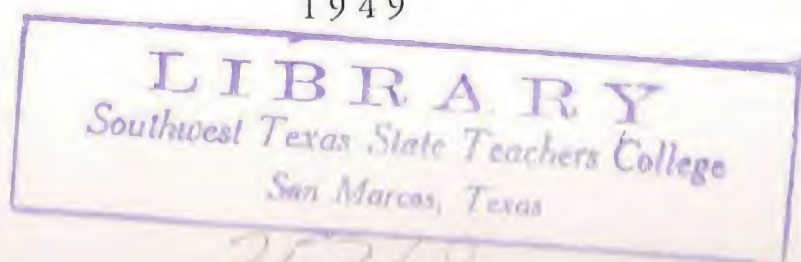
CHARLES LEIRENS

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Tombstone of Guillaume Dufay

## EARLY PERIOD

THE period in which Belgian music dominated Europe coincides closely with the one in which Belgian painting gave to the world the richest flowering of its genius. Van Eyck and Van der Weyden were born in 1385 and 1390, respectively; Binchois and Dufay in 1400. The career of Memling extends from 1440 to

1494; Okeghem was born in 1430 and died in 1495. This parallel could be developed further, citing, for example, the cases of Gerard David, Hieronymus Bosch and Jan Gossaert who belong, like Josquin des Prés and Adriaan Willaert, to the second half of the XVth and first half of the XVIth century. But space does not permit such detailed demonstration. The subject to be discussed is vast, and already threatens to exceed the limits prescribed for this study. We have mentioned several names which rank among the foremost in European painting; the works of Van Eyck, Van der Weyden, and Memling constitute the most precious treasure of our museums and our civil and religious monuments; the fame of our painters is not only unquestioned, but their message is familiar to all men of culture. Our greatest musicians, on the other hand, may almost be said to belong, at least for the average concert-goer, to the realm of archeology, and of that highly special archeology which interests only a few scholars, erudites, and dilettantes. A barrier, fortunately becoming less formidable, still separates our old musicians from the public; too many performers, in search of easy success, have contributed, by their exclusiveness, first to create and then to prolong the misunderstanding; it is based, we would like to point out, on several historical factors, on a lack of elementary information, and on a sluggishness of mind which our aversion to painstaking effort and detail has only strengthened rather than combatted.

The general culture of our elite — and the great public rapidly adopts their watchwords today — has acquired such flexibility that we can take an equal interest in oriental philosophy, Homeric mythology, the polemics of a Pascal on the subject of predestination, and the scepticism of a Montaigne and Voltaire. Nothing which makes up the *spirit* of a work constitutes an obstacle between that work and the public; each time that the *contact* between a type of literature and a group of readers has been attempted, this contact has been effected in spite of all considerations of a geographic or historical order. For late XIXth century France to be seized with a sudden infatuation for Russian literature required only the inter-

mediation of a vulgarizer and a few translators. To "approach" a work of art, one has to know the language used by the author or to resort to the interpretation of a translation, transcription, or theoretical explanation, the latter being designed to awaken us to a new and more profound significance. To substantiate my point, I shall cite only the example of Chateaubriand, whose influence was the determining factor in bringing about an understanding of "barbaric" architecture, i.e., the great edifices of the Middle Ages.

#### The Problems Raised by the Music of the XVth and XVIth Centuries

The great period of music in the Belgian provinces corresponds to an epoch in which the musical language has little in common with the grammar and syntax of the so-called classical era. This musical language of the XVth and XVIth centuries, as I shall explain further on, was in some aspects much more complicated and even richer than the one familiar to us today. The esthetic rules governing the period were in open contradiction to those in use among the musicians who enjoy a slightly overpowering popularity at the present time. The musician of the XVth and XVIth centuries seeks above all to express a religious ideal. He makes no effort to please the public, to bring the listeners under his spell. He is offering up to God the homage of a work in which the particular resources of his art are made to yield all that is in them. He will write a motet for thirty-four voices, without any concern as to whether the listener is able to trace them throughout. Like the Gothic architect, he sends up his spire toward the heavens, and his ambition is to make it reach as far as possible. In classical—especially in romantic—music, the composer looks for a means of self-expression, a channel for confession. Some of Beethoven's Adagios, for example, certain Chopin Nocturnes or Wagner Preludes, in spite of their intrinsic beauty, are practically diagrams of the emotions, temperature charts of the composer himself. The contemporary musician speaks *to* the people, the XVth century musician speaks *for* them.

### The Musical Language

Logically, such aspirations, such an ideal, required an adequate language. Musical historians have sometimes wondered why the art of sound passed first through a stage purely polyphonic to arrive at a style almost entirely harmonic, compromising meanwhile, for almost a century, on the admirable combination of polyphony and harmony embodied in the works of Johann Sebastian Bach. We believe the phenomenon to be at least partially explained by the fact that the purely polyphonic style corresponds more exactly than any other to the esthetic ideal of the XVth and XVIth centuries in music. It was a form, sometimes incorrectly called "primitive," which was admirably fitted to express the contemplative attitude, and which adapted itself to the quality of immutable sentiments. Its mechanism was established, once and for all, allowing the musician to soar into regions of the infinite. It offered no temptation to the artist for those sudden shifts which, in the romantic style, often by a single chord, mark a change in mood, a revolt, an ecstasy that is purely of this world. The style of the XVth and XVIth century — that of a Dufay, an Okeghem, a Josquin — is ideological, symbolical, not adapted to the expression of the passing or the changing in life, almost incapable of modulation (this last is essentially a harmonic property). It is a style devoid of those tensions which the composer tightens or relaxes to communicate to us the tumult of passions by which he himself is swept. There is no magic manipulation, no sorcery in this music, it has no knowledge of wizardry or its dangerous wiles; and if it is bound to earth, it is only by certain realistic and somewhat childish details inherent in the Gothic spirit. The polyphony of an Okeghem or a Willaert, elaborated with the same skill as that of Bach, is, as we have said, a plain polyphony in that it is devoid of all reference to harmonic functions. The counterpoint of Bach or Haendel, on the other hand, achieves its relief and its volume through the harmonic structure which sustains it. One is a painting executed in flat colors, and the other, a stained glass window whose design is only visible

when lighted from without. More important still is the fact that the music of our XVth and XVIth century artists was based on the ancient liturgical modes which have fallen into disuse with the almost tyrannical adoption of the C Major and the corresponding A Minor scale. In the formulation of harmony as a musical language, Johann Sebastian Bach, and the predecessors who laid the foundations of his task, had to work out a simplification which involved the sacrifice of nearly all the scales which had been developed in the Greek system and in the Gregorian plainsong. Consequently, music which antedates the XVIIth century gives us an impression of strangeness and instability, which certain arrangers of the beginning of that century tried to remedy by adding an organ accompaniment to the Gregorian chants, and "embellishing" the masses of Palestrina or the motets of Roland de Lassus with instrumental parts! There seems no better illustration of the break with a past, which is none the less far from remote; no clearer explanation of the barrier between us and the great musicians who are the subject of this study. We believe, however, that the estrangement between the modern public and one of the most glorious eras in musical history is only temporary. The great tide of romanticism is already ebbing, and during the last twenty years our musical horizon has been remarkably widened — thanks to pioneers like Charles Bordes in France, Sir Richard Runciman Terry in England, Kurt Sachs in Germany, and Charles Van den Borren in Belgium. The music of the past is coming back into the light of day. Excellent records have already familiarized us with the early polyphony of the XIIIth and XIVth centuries; and the period dominated by the genius of Binchois, Brassart, Clemens, Dufay, Okeghem, Jacob Obrecht, Pierre de la Rue, Josquin des Prés, and Roland de Lassus (also called Orlando di Lasso) will inevitably profit by the great renaissance movement which is on the way, and to which, as far as this country is concerned, the courageous and successful efforts of a Paul Boepple, a Robert Shaw and a Harold Geer have already so largely contributed.



### The Belgian Schools

The genius of the musicians mentioned above, who are only the most outstanding of the Belgian School, did, in fact, dominate for



Dufay and Binchois

a century and a half the whole of Europe, stretching from the Scheldt to Prussia, Italy, and Spain. Everywhere they founded schools, directed cathedral choirs, lent impressiveness to religious and secular ceremonies, served princes, prelates, and Popes.

Binchois, born in Binche or at Mons around 1400, became Choir Master for Philip of Burgundy at the age of twenty-five.

Seven years later he was appointed canon at St. Waudru in Mons, receiving at the same time the benefices of Cassel, Bruges, and Soignies. In 1452 he was permanently installed in the service of the Duke of Burgundy, and died at Lille in 1460. His work is mostly secular, and seldom goes beyond the composition for three voices most popular in his day. He enjoyed a high reputation during his lifetime, but history does not seem to have confirmed the unreserved recognition granted him by the musicians of his own time. Present-day musicologists attach much greater importance to his contemporary, *Guillaume Dufay* (born in Hainaut before 1400, died at Cambrai in 1474), considered, along with Binchois, as the founder of the first Belgian School. In contrast to Binchois, he was liberal in his acceptance of Italian influences, while remaining true to the Gothic traditions, and the reconciliation of the two trends was largely his work. This eclecticism explains the special quality of his inspiration, since his

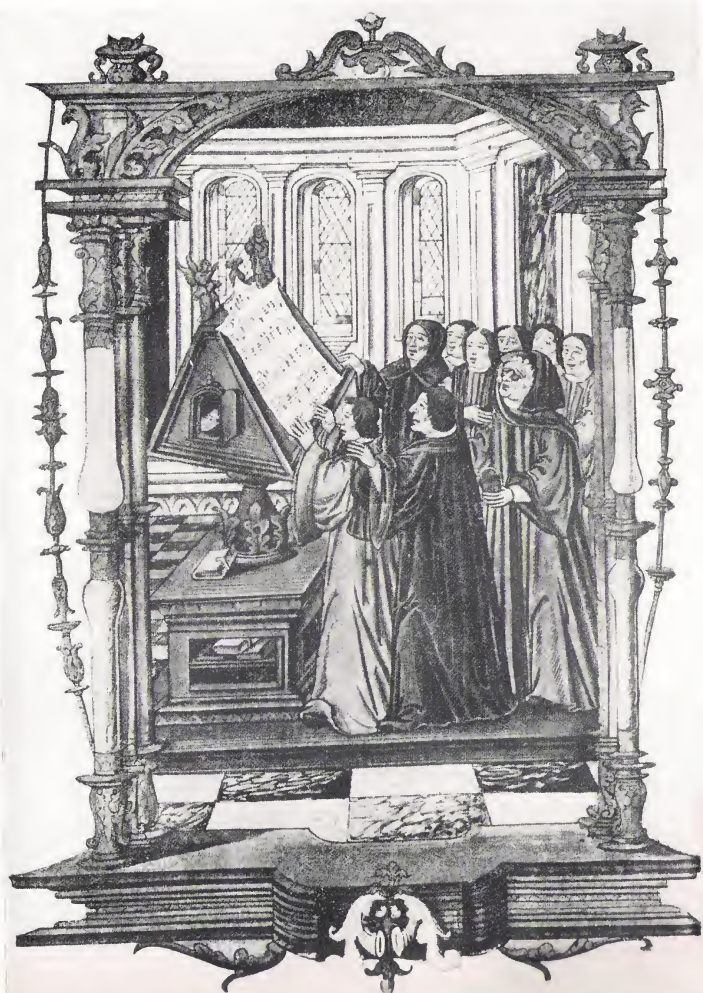
work is characterized by a skillful compromise between the rather rigid style of the Gothic construction and the more polished and elegant manners of the Florentines. The brusque succession of fifths and fourths, familiar to the XIIIth and XIVth centuries, gave way to more subtle sequences of thirds and sixths. The resulting impression is one of suavity and tenderness; a new light bathes this music of somewhat limited horizon which none the less succeeds in softening the contours, in becoming more human without losing the glow of religious fervor. From a purely technical viewpoint, Dufay's work is of great importance in the freer use of the canon, which he rejected as a set piece, to employ it as a means of giving unity to a composition.

### Dufay's Career

The influence exercised by the musicians of the Belgian provinces and the more and more extensive part they were to play, are indicated by the career of Dufay. He was a vocalist at the Cathedral of Cambrai and then at the Papal Chapel in 1428; he later became canon at Cambrai and at Mons, posts which he kept until his death. The fact that Philip the Good entrusted him with the musical education of his son Charles is proof of the esteem in which he was held by his contemporaries.

### Jacob Obrecht

*Jacob Obrecht* (Utrecht circa 1430 — Ferrara 1505) and *Jan Okeghem* (probably born at Dendermonde [Termonde] early XVth century, died around 1495) bring us to the second polyphonic school of the Belgian provinces. Though Obrecht, because of his strictly Dutch origin, does not belong exactly within the limits of this study, his name may be included, in view of the fact that his most important activities were centered in Belgium. In 1489 he was called to practise his art at the St. Donat church in Bruges, where he pursued his apostleship until 1500. To this post he added that of Choir Master in the Cathedral of Antwerp, which thanks to his presence became one of the principal centers of at-



*J. Okeghem and his choir*

traction in Europe. From everywhere musicians flocked to enjoy the benefit of his concerts and to submit their compositions to him. The name of Obrecht is forever linked to one of the greatest forms of religious music, the Motet of the Passion, of which he offered the first example in a work dedicated to the Duke of Ferrara.

#### Okeghem

But the figure of Okeghem is outstanding for a different reason. His work marks a definite turning point in the evolution of the art of sound. It is to Okeghem, and in a lesser measure to Obrecht, that we owe the discovery of a musical rhetoric which for centuries was to establish the continuity of musical discourse. We have already seen the use by Dufay of the canon, whose contours he had rendered more flexible in order to fit it into the musical structure. But this means of assuring coherence to a long composition demanded a subtlety and a skill not always to be found; its resources were limited and the danger of sterile repetitions lay in the path of the composer at every turn. It was at this point that Okeghem and Obrecht discovered the almost unlimited resources of the principle of "imitation." Henceforth a given melody or song repeated itself, but not in identical form; the voices built up a series of imitations with a liberty and audacity which suggests the play of distorting mirrors. We can pass over the subsequent abuse of this process by others and by Okeghem himself, in augmentation, diminution, inversion, and reversion. What is to be kept in mind is that these various artifices were to provide Josquin, Roland de Lassus, Palestrina, and Vittoria with one of their richest means of expression, and to culminate, two centuries and a half later, in the superb syntheses of *The Art of the Fugue* and the *Musical Offering* by Johann Sebastian Bach. But in the general search for unity and coherence, these devices, in spite of their richness, were not enough. An important element was still lacking. In this musical discourse which streamed into wide horizontal perspectives, a vertical element was indispensable. Harmony, the art of logically and agreeably linking together blocks of simultaneous sounds, was about to



be born. The system of modes, the multiplicity of scales constituted, however, an almost insurmountable obstacle. *Musica Ficta*, that is the introduction of accidentals to enlarge or diminish the interval between two sounds in the scale, was soon to adjust the differences which separated the different modes, and to a certain extent establish a solid basis for the musical system. All that was now required was a composer of genius to exploit this fresh domain and to combine the contrapuntal resources of the former period with a coherent and logical system of simultaneous sounds.

#### Josquin des Prés

This musician was found in the person of *Josquin des Prés* (circa 1445-Condé 1521). His origin is in doubt, though historians

usually place him in French Flanders, and the town of Condé is most often given as his probable birthplace. That being the case, he does not strictly belong to the group of composers considered in this article. But he is unquestionably a member of the same line, and also the most famous pupil of Okeghem, hence to be briefly noted here. His work, in any case, is too rich and too vast to be given adequate



IOSQVINVS PRATENSIS.

treatment without the aid of musical examples. His innumerable motets, hymns, psalms, songs, his masses, including the celebrated one on the theme of the Man in Arms, demonstrate the diversity and abundance of his inspiration. This word "inspiration," which we have scarcely been tempted to employ for his predecessors, comes instinctively to critics writing of his work, for Josquin is the first musician in the modern sense of the word. His style is indeed one of expression; creative imagination lights up all this music, behind which is felt at last the vibrant life of a human being.

We have only to hear his famous "Lament for Jehan Okeghem," composed in memory of his master, to realize that this time music has been enriched, not by new technical devices but with qualities that are simply human — that music at last is entering into the Promised Land.

#### Adriaan Willaert

With *Adriaan Willaert* (born in Roeselaere [Roulers], probably in 1480—died in Venice 1562) we come to the threshold of the XVIth century, and this time it is to be a Flemish musician who puts again his imprint upon the innovations in technique and expression. But Willaert is only the most famous among the Nordic musicians of his day, who exercised so general an influence throughout Europe that certain historians of the art call this influence by the name of "colonization." Paris, Madrid, Florence, Venice, Ferrara, Rome, Vienna, Munich and Prague all welcomed Belgian musicians, entrusted them with the direction of schools, Academies, Cathedral Classes; gave assiduous attention to their teachings, before taking stock of their own genius. Nowhere was this influence more profound than in Venice. When, in 1527, Willaert was appointed Choir Master at St. Mark's, after having served the King of Bohemia as Cantor, he was certainly struck by the elaborateness of the setting in which he was called upon to fulfill functions, as well as the sumptuous impressiveness of a liturgy which the Nordic countries were never to know. Venice at this moment was the commercial center of the world, the meeting place of occidental and oriental influences, the cradle of a culture perhaps more brilliant than profound. It is the moment in which music is becoming more and more divorced from the liturgy and from its most perfect ornament, the four-voiced choir without accompaniment. The two great reigning forms, the *motet* and the *madrigal* — the latter derived from the Frottola and the Villanelle, of which it is merely a nobler and more refined expression — are being rapidly transformed. Polyphony is ceasing to be purely vocal; from now on it accepts instrumental devices. The madrigal, in particular, is to attack the problem of expressing all the subtleties





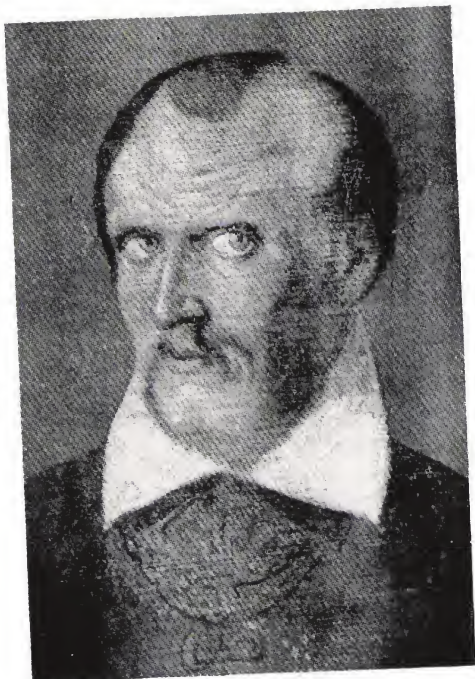
*Adriaan Willaert*

and all the bold qualities of secular poetry. The transformation of the madrigal is to have immense repercussions on technical evolution. The preponderance assumed by the soprano over the tenor, the wider and wider adoption of a fifth voice, are to upset the equilibrium established for centuries, and lead straight to innovations from which the fugue emerges in full panoply. But its role goes even further. Like the Sonata form of the XIXth century, the madrigal is destined to become the vehicle for new ideas, the chosen

medium for all musicians desirous of escaping from the forms worn thin by time and routine. It is hard to estimate Willaert's exact part in this process of crystallization and formulation; to determine, even, in how far he is responsible for another innovation, the double antithetical chorus, with questions and answers, echos, and violent contrasts, a formula so well fitted to express the Baroque ideal and which was to lead to the orchestral dynamism of a Giovanni Gabrielli, a Haendel, a Bach and a Beethoven. In Art, forces sometimes seem to evolve through a sort of inner impulsion, the artists' role being to recognize these forces and channelize them toward the fore-ordained goal. It is useless, moreover, to yield to the temptation of facile hypotheses. The greatness of the personage in this case rests on too solid a base for us to lend him any claims to fame which are not strictly subject to verification. Willaert is without question the foremost madrigalist of his time, and the founder of the Venetian School which was to reign for a century and a half, with his pupils Zarlino, one of the greatest theorists of the XVIth century, and Cypriaan de Rore (a Fleming whose boldness so profoundly influenced his contemporaries), Andrea and Giovanni Gabrielli, Donato Croce and Francesco Cavalli, as its most illustrious representatives.

#### **The Supremacy of the Belgian Composers**

Given the character of this publication, it has seemed necessary to emphasize the outstanding role played by Belgian musicians in the rapid transformation of the language of musical sounds, at the risk of somewhat overshadowing the intrinsic value of the works they have left to us. We are indeed convinced that the beauty of a composition is not to be demonstrated in words; it is dependent on being heard and can only be proved with the aid of the music itself. We believe, however, that the historical importance of the Nordic composers has been sufficiently explained for the reader to realize that the Schools referred to exercised for almost a century and a half a veritable supremacy on the European continent; yet this supremacy never took the form of conquests which swept away the past, stifled national genius, or imposed sterile disciplines. The



*Cypriaan de Rore*

death of Willaert marks with fair exactitude the moment when the teaching of the Masters was to bear fruit, and their influence to be absorbed in the rise of the first National Schools. From now on there is to be less question of Flemish, Franco-Flemish or Dutch styles: a new chapter is opening in the history of music. Italian music, German music are to be born, and gradually detach themselves from the Nordic systems. Certain musicians belonging to the line of Okeghem, Josquin and Willaert will still be in evidence, but Italy and Germany will have some claims of their own to participate in the immense prestige of such masters. For Germany

there are to be Jacobus de Kerle, Jacob Regnart, Jean de Clève, François Sale, who belong to the realm of history rather than Art. For Italy the names are *Philippe de Monte* and *Roland de Lassus* (Mons 1530-Munich 1594), destined to leave their mark on the final synthesis of the polyphonic style which arose from the movement of Catholic Reform and the Counter-Reformation. Their glory has been somewhat eclipsed, and wrongly so, by that of their great contemporary, *Palestrina*. This is explained by the outstanding role which ill-informed historians have attributed to the last named in the reforms growing out of the Council of Trent. From a purely musical viewpoint, *de Monte* and *Lassus* are perhaps more representative of the spirit of the century than was *Palestrina*. That spirit was one of innovation, of the search for formulas based on tradition but constantly renewed in the efforts to find unused modes of expression and fresh sources of inspiration. Their contribution to the solution of that problem which the genius of Bach was finally to solve — a balancing of the contrapuntal style with harmonic writing — is equalled in importance only by that of a Josquin. Although the innumerable madrigals of *Philippe de Monte* may in some ways be identified with the Italian models in that genre, the writing of the Belgian composer preserves a more polyphonic character, his structure is more closely knit, his craftsmanship more meticulous. In this respect he remains Nordic, more so than his contemporary Roland de Lassus.

#### **Philippe de Monte**

The work of *Philippe de Monte*, though of considerable extent (35 masses, more than 1,000 madrigals, more than 300 motets are known), was neglected for three centuries. This injustice was due, partially at least, to the fact that an inventory of his work demanded laborious research, and musicologists, even as expert ones as Ambros and de Witt, hesitated before the task. But in 1927, thanks to the enthusiastic instigation of Canon Van Nuffel, Director of the Choir school at St. Rombaut in Mechlin, and to a Mac-





cenae from Antwerp, Monsieur Henri Fester, the Queen Elizabeth Foundation and the University Foundation granted the necessary funds for the publication of his entire work. Less than fifteen years was required for musicologists and public alike to ratify the judgment on *de Monte* expressed by Doctor Seldt, Vice-Chancellor at the Court of Vienna, in a letter addressed to his Master, Duke Albert V of Bavaria:

"I know him well; he is as quiet, as timid, and as gentle as a girl . . . and he is without question the first-ranking composer in the country, especially in the new music. . . ."

#### Roland de Lassus

History has been more generous, and more just, with regard to *Roland de Lassus* and the importance as well as the beauty of his work justifies any comparison that can be made. Lassus is without question, along with Palestrina, the greatest composer of his century. His "Magnum Opus," published after his death (in 1604) by his sons, bears witness to a production as vast as it was eclectic: it includes no less than 500 motets, for two to twelve voices. The perspective of time makes it possible for us to estimate more clearly than his contemporaries the fundamental originality of this work, and to determine what distinguishes it from the most eminent compositions of Palestrina. The inspiration of the great Italian composer was above all the echo of a confident faith, expressing itself with serenity, an almost Olympian majesty, which is the exact opposite of the dynamism, the impetuosity, the dramatic accent, the comic and picturesque sense of Lassus. Palestrina strives to interpret the general character of the text by a music that is broad and unified. Lassus seeks to "illustrate the meaning of the words by bold modulations and a use of chromatics which follow all the variations in the text." This manner of writing, which thirty years ago would have been known as the "art" form, in no way excludes a profound mysticism. His "Seven Penitential Psalms," composed between 1563 and 1570, at the request of Duke Albert, are sufficient to place the Mons musician among the most eminent masters of religious music, and it is no exaggeration to say that rarely in the course of the ages has so grandiose and austere a theme been transposed into the language of music with such imposing breadth of style. It is remarkable, as Charles van den Borren has said, that having a relatively monotonous subject to treat, Lassus has maintained the highest level of his own music, right through to the end.

### The Dawn of the XVIIIth Century

We come then to the dawn of the XVIIIth century: the supremacy of the northern musicians will quickly give way before the extraordinary flowering of talent to blossom first in Italy, then in Germany. Belgium will have other musicians to claim as her own in the periods to follow, but these artists will be solitary figures; no longer will it be a matter of Schools, much less of supremacy. But let us not forget that with the exception of France, whose presence on the musical stage is almost uninterrupted from the XIIIth century down to the present, few countries have exercised such a decisive and prolonged influence on the destiny of Art. The public and the musicians themselves are sometimes too inclined to see in Germany the fountain-head whence flowed all the inspiration of European music; but even if one goes as far back as the great Schutz, whose work is just beginning to be appreciated, Germany, by her genius, has only dominated musical Europe for two centuries and a half. And it is not mixing Art and Politics to say that the contribution of our country, that of France, of Holland and of Italy, the influence of the musicians of Western and Southern Europe, are in no respect inferior to that inheritance which our eastern neighbors claim as their most precious.

It remains for us to formulate a vow: the catastrophe of which we were the unhappy witnesses has ended, but part of our greatest hopes have been challenged and the unity we had dreamed of seems to be once more postponed and even jeopardized. And yet, the division of Europe has to yield, sooner or later, to a larger or more flexible system permitting all men of good will to share in a renaissance which may be either general or not at all, to collaborate in a movement where each individual shall feel that his material welfare and spiritual enrichment depend upon the extent to which he is allowed to establish contacts beyond a purely national sphere. Let us hope that this evolution, as inevitable as it is necessary, will be blended with a profounder understanding of the moral and intellectual discipline which has made great the regions





to which we belong. In this respect, the periods that we have examined rapidly offer an instructive example of present interest. Our great musicians of the XVth and XVIth centuries were European in the measure in which they remained faithful to the particular cultures which molded them. Let us try to embrace the whole world, to become conscious of the great community to which we belong, but let us, at the same time, seek to find those roots from which we sprang. France, England, Belgium, and Holland, to speak only of the western fringe of Europe, possess a glorious musical past with which they are unacquainted; they can enrich themselves and the community at large only by seeking, in the contact and study of their national traditions, the meaning and direction of a new Renaissance and a new humanism. And let us not forget the prophetic sentence written by Ernest Renan, exactly a century ago: "For us idealists, one single doctrine is true, the transcendent doctrine according to which the purpose of mankind is the creation of a larger conscience, or, as they put it in the old days, the greater glory of God."

## THE CONTEMPORARY PERIOD

### *XVIIIth and XIXth Centuries*

The great variety of material to be treated in this section will not permit of the chronological system adopted in the previous pages. The personalities to be dealt with exercised their activities in fields that were scarcely heard of during the preceding periods. Along with composers, we have eminent virtuosos, historians, musicologists, pedagogues. Certain among them have accomplished their missions in the service of institutions whose existence is too closely associated with the activity of Belgium for us not to attempt an explanation of their influence and the determining role which they have played in the development of the artists and the education of the public. This statement applies particularly to the XIXth century, for the preceding century is dominated by two great figures who in themselves represent Belgium's great contribution to the "Concert of Europe."

#### Gossec

*François-Joseph Gossec* (Vergnies 1734—Passy 1829) and *André-Ernest Grétry* (Liège 1741 — Montmorency 1813) exercised their role as composers in two very different fields.

*Gossec* is above all a "symphonist"; *Grétry* a man of the theatre. The work of the former is mainly historical in its importance, while the latter was endowed with qualities whose charm still persists for the listener of today. The official career of *Gossec* began in 1751, when he entered the service of the Farmer General, La Pouplinière. Curiously enough, the composer who was to have such an important role in the revolutionary scene owed his first success to the protection of personalities of outstanding importance in the Ancien Régime. At the death of the Farmer General, who had engaged him on the recommendation of Rameau, he moved to the House of the Prince of Conti and the Prince of Condé. He was one of those happy men who enjoy general favor. Not only did he have sufficient leisure to allow free rein to his inspiration, but he was provided with that much rarer resource for the composer—a ready



**GOSSET,**  
(François-Joseph)  
*Chev. de la Légion d'honneur*  
Mé à Verdun (Jouy) le 27 Janvier 1793. Eté en 1793

means of performance for everything he wrote. It was for the musicians of the Farmer General that he wrote his quartets and symphonies, the first of which (1754) preceded by five years the first symphony of Haydn. In his position as comptroller for the Prince of Condé, he enjoyed an enormous prestige he used to good purpose in extending his field of activity. His "Mass for the Dead" (1760) created a sensation, thanks to a device which doubtless stems from Willaert and the Venetian School. He wrote the "Tuba Mirum" for two orchestras — one of wind instruments placed outside the church, and a corresponding string orchestra set up in the choir. The success of this staging was such that the composer used it again in his "Oratorio of the Nativity" in which a choir of "invisible" angels produced an effect of distance which may have inspired Wagner for certain scenes of Parsifal. We must acknowledge that posterity has not ratified the judgment of his contemporaries with regard to Gossec but it is undeniable that his influence on the development of instrumental music in France was enormous. In the field of orchestral technique his activity was all the more fruitful since, in his position of founder, animator, or director of several concert societies ("le Concert des Amateurs," the "Concerts Spiriteux," the "Concerts de l'Académie," the Ecole de Chant" — which became the Conservatory) the composer had the means of trying out certain new effects and of being assured a faithful execution for whatever he wished to attempt. Even in the evolution of symphonic form and the enrichment of orchestral tone coloring, his activity constitutes a fortunate asset to that of Johann Christoph Bach, Able, Stamitz and the musicians of the Mannheim School. During the period of the Revolution, the composer followed the example of his colleagues Lesueur, Méhul, and Cherubini, in transferring with facility to the service of new masters. He contributed largely to the festivals and ceremonies of the new cult, in a series of grandiloquent works in the spirit of the time, like his "Fourteenth of July Hymn," "Tribute to Liberty," "Hymn to the Supreme Being," "Music for the Funeral of Mirabeau" (in which there is a striking effect achieved with



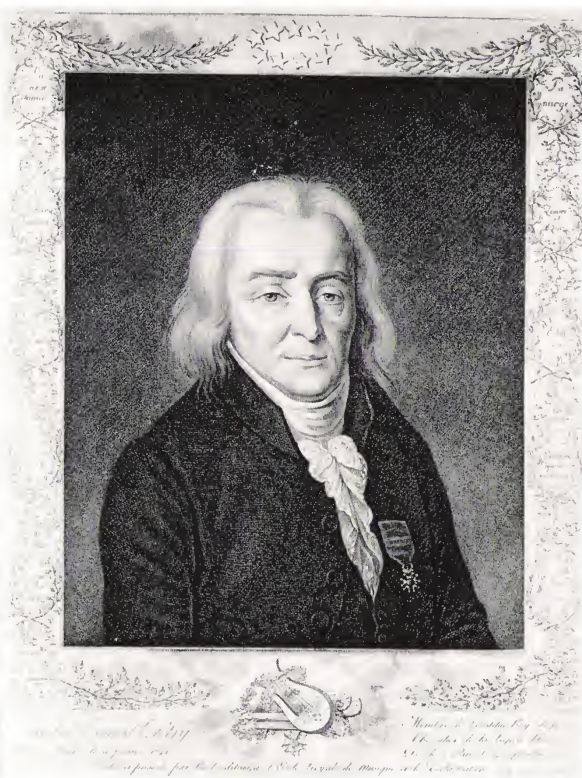
gongs). "When one thinks," writes Landormy, "of the pomp and circumstance of those ceremonies, where military symphonies were played in the public square by huge orchestras, where patriotic hymns were chanted by thousands of choristers and repeated by all the gathered multitude, one cannot help thinking that Berlioz, the pupil of Lesueur and the composer of "la Symphonie Funèbre et Triomphale" and the "Requiem" for Five Orchestras, inherits directly from all those musicians of the revolutionary period.

### Grétry

In contrast to this composer of highly colored and showy grandstand effects, history offers us the personification of delicacy, poise, measure, and discretion in *André Ernest Grétry*.

*Grétry* is much more representative of an epoch — the close of the XVIIIth century — than he is of either his native country or his adopted ones, France and Italy. His success, less sensational than that of Gossec, is perhaps of superior quality. He was an admirer of Grimm and Voltaire (he asked the latter for the libretto to one of his compositions). Mozart and Beethoven borrowed themes from him. The Théâtre Favart and the Académie de Musique (which became the Opéra Comique and the Opera of Paris) ordered pieces from him. Then came official recognition: Napoleon made him Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur and granted him a pension; the Institute, in its very year of foundation, reserved for him one of the three chairs designated in the by-laws for composers of music. This was a distinction which he shared with his colleague Gossec.

This success did not distract him from his work. He composed tirelessly, writing 50 operas, six symphonies, quartets, sonatas. And above that groundwork we have numerous pieces of a light and graceful charm, like the "Tableau Parlant," "Céphale et Procris" (the ballet of this piece, in a version by Felix Mottl, still figures on the program of all concert societies), "Richard Coeur de Lion," in which his muse successfully deals with a subject of greater scope. From the point of view of pure esthetics, he took his stand once



*André Ernest Grétry*

and for all: he belongs with the Encyclopedists; he was part of all the fads of his period, and it is hard to tell which he fell in with, and which he started himself. For him, dramatic style in music was more important than all other. He extolled the "back to na-

ture" theory — which for the theatre meant a declamation following as closely as possible the inflection of the speaking voice, the dramatic accent derived from the accepted language of the passions, a technique so skillful and so neatly adapted to the exigencies of the stage that artifice itself serves to give the impression of naturalistic truth.

Before any consideration of the XXth century, contemporary musicians and their predecessors, we must give at least a passing glance to three great virtuosos of the bow for whom history has registered only the renown and the achievements associated with their names. They represent, in both these respects, a range of importance that precludes omitting them from a study of this sort.

#### Bériot

*Charles Auguste de Bériot* (Louvain 1802-1870) and *Henri Vieuxtemps* (Verviers 1820-Mustapha-lez-Algers 1881) both exercised an influence at once profound and lasting on the technique of their instruments. Both belonged to that group of virtuosos who, like Paganini, Thalberg, Joachim, Rubinstein and Liszt, toured the world (Vieuxtemps even made three tours in the United States) arousing enthusiasm everywhere, and — more important still — inspiring a vogue of virtuosity which in the long run was of great benefit to music itself. *Bériot*, whose career was cut short by blindness, visited England, France, and Italy, in the company of his wife, the famous singer, La Malibran. Appointed Professor at the Brussels Conservatory, he continued his musical apostleship over a period of nine years. He shares, with his colleague, Vieuxtemps, the glory of having founded that Franco-Belgian school of the violin of which Eugène Ysaye, at the close of the century, was the most illustrious representative.

#### Vieuxtemps

Of more robust constitution, his pupil, *Vieuxtemps*, was able to give a more complete accounting of his ability. He was more widely associated with the most eminent personalities of his epoch—Paganini, Schumann (who wrote enthusiastically about him in the

*Neue Zeitschrift*, Richard Wagner, Czerny, Spohr, Thalberg (with whom he made his second tour in America), the great cellist, *Servais* (1807-1866), a Belgian like himself, who accompanied him on his second tour in Russia. History has stamped the name of Vieuxtemps as that of one of the greatest violinists of modern times, praising especially his amazing staccato, his rich sonority, his mastery of the bow. His compositions are perhaps the best evidence of his prodigious technique. In spite of a certain turgidity and a constant striving after effects, they display a virtuosity which is transcendent, and are high above the general level of virtuoso compositions. A number of them still figure in the repertoire of the most noted violinists. In closing we may note that this "King of Violinists" contributed largely to the reputation of the Royal Conservatory of Brussels, where he headed the violin classes from 1871 to 1873.

#### Eugène Ysaye

The name of *Eugène Ysaye* (Liège 1858—Brussels 1931) is still so closely associated with the contemporary musical movement, and there are even now so many to bear witness to his extraordinary career, that long commentaries could add nothing to his prestige. How can one explain the unique impression which his mere appearance on the platform never failed to create? He possessed one of those rare personalities which stir the heart of each listener and prepare him to experience emotions of which he never dreamed himself capable. Those who have enjoyed the rare privilege of hearing Ysaye in the Franck sonata, the Beethoven or Brahms concerto will agree with me that his sublime art opened a higher realm where the commonest of mortals might walk for a moment by the side of genius. Ysaye toured extensively in Germany, Russia, England and America, appearing as soloist, conductor, and as member of a quartet. In 1918, he was appointed Director of the Cincinnati Orchestra.

From a more strictly Belgian point of view, it is important to remember the profound influence he exercised for twelve years





*Eugène Ysaÿe*

(from 1886 to 1898) as Professor at the Royal Conservatory of Brussels, as well as the distinguished services he rendered the cause of modern music by the foundation of the *Société des Concerts Ysaÿe* (1898). The "revolutionary" programs given at these concerts introduced the public to the notable works of Franck, Lekeu, Vincent d'Indy, Chausson, Dukas, Debussy, and Fauré.



*César Franck at the Organ*

#### César Franck

The two dominant figures of the XIXth century are without question the highly gifted *César Franck* (Liège 1822—Paris 1890) and the admirable musician, *Guillaume Lekeu* (Heusy 1870 — Angers 1894), whose creative activity was interrupted in its prime by the fact of his premature death. Everything, even too much, has been said about the work of the former. The ardent enthusiasm of certain disciples has, by its exaggeration, tended to weaken rather than strengthen his fame. They have made the mistake, in analyz-

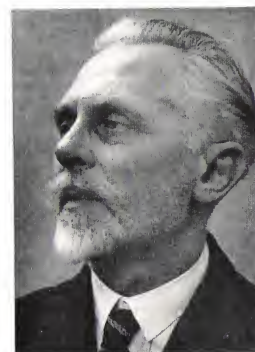
ing his work, of putting too much emphasis on the systematic character of his technique. Franck was a born composer, and history will remember him more because of the spontaneity and abundance of his inspiration than because of certain esthetic theories which tended to overweight his work. In spite of a rather poor orchestral craftsmanship, the "D-Minor Symphony," "The Accursed Huntsman" (notwithstanding certain overly-Wagnerian echoes), the "Symphonic Variations," "Psyche," and the "Beatitudes" (in part) remain masterworks whose glory neither time nor fashion can dim. And yet, it is not here that Franck is at his best. His String Quartet, his Quintet with Piano, the Choral Prelude and Fugue, the Prelude, Aria and Finale, the Sonata for Violin and Piano (which certain exegetes of the works of Proust identify as the celebrated sonata of Vinteuil), all reveal other enduring qualities. Here, all is to be admired—and almost without reservation; the solidarity of the construction, too stressed perhaps in the Symphony and the Quartet, the refinement of the harmonic language, a polyphony more natural than elaborate (the canon in the finale of the sonata is remarkable in this respect), a firm melodic structure, such are the most characteristic qualities of these works. But Franck was an organist above all, and it was only when seated at the organ keyboard that he felt really at ease. The three Chorales—his last work—are only equalled in organ literature by the works of Bach in the same genre. This opinion, which may seem hyperbolic, is the same, however, as that held by Liszt.

#### Guillaume Lekeu

*Lekeu*, who died at the age of 24, left only four works, but their originality and their depth of inspiration is such as to assure for all time the fame of their composer. They are the Sonata for Violin and Piano, the Quartet with Piano, the Fantasy on Two Angevin Folk Tunes, and the Adagio for Strings—which is undoubtedly his masterpiece. The dominant note in these compositions is a sort of nostalgia, a fierce kind of despair. A presentiment of early death explains perhaps the predominance of this special atmosphere, so

marked that three measures chosen at random in these celebrated works will serve at once to identify their author.

The influence exercised by Franck and Lekeu upon their successors has been so overwhelming (certain Flemings and the present generation have alone escaped) that there seems reason to regret so complete a domination. In some cases the influence was indirect. Men like Joseph Jongen (Liège 1873), Victor Vreuls (Verviers 1876), Théo Ysaye, brother of the famous violinist (Verviers 1875—Nice 1918) either consciously or unconsciously follow the lead of Franck's great disciple, the French composer, Vincent d'Indy. It is well known with what devotion and enthusiasm this thorough musician gave himself to the work of teaching, and also how, on the pretext of going back to the Beethoven tradition, he preached the cult of arbitrary construction.



Joseph Jongen

Nevertheless *Joseph Jongen* composed some music of very real merit: his pieces are skillfully written and the best of them are related by their inspiration to Wallonian folklore: the Fantasy on Two Noels, the Trio for Piano, Violin and Viola, the second Quartet, the Impressions of Ardennes, the Symphony with Organ, several really inspired melodies, testify an irreproachable craftsmanship, a facility in the development, a freshness of inspiration which should assure their permanence. Jongen is clearly the most artistic representative of the Franco-Wallonian school.

Something more virile and resolute, but less subtle perhaps, breathes through the work of *Vreuls*, composer of an opera, "Olivier le Simple" (libretto by Jules Delacre), which has not,



perhaps, been sufficiently appreciated by either public or critics. His musical production is important and his famous sonata for piano and violin shows a youthful promise not completely fulfilled in later works.

A group of Flemish composers, whose most representative names are the great Peter Benoit (Harelbeke 1834 — Antwerp 1901), Jan Blockx (Antwerp 1851-1912), and Auguste de Boeck, participated perhaps unconsciously in the movement of regionalism, which has had manifestations of unquestionably greater importance in Norway, with Grieg, and in Russia, with the "Five."

#### Peter Benoit

The work of *Peter Benoit* deserves to be examined, even though briefly, as he is the initiator of a movement whose extra-artistic repercussions had perhaps escaped his prevision. During his long and productive career he never ceased to promote a purely Flemish art, and though the judgment of his compatriots has not always been shared abroad, one must acknowledge that such works as "Lucifer," the "Rubens Cantate," and "De Schelde" are frescoes of a slightly rudimentary nature, but of a very sure effect when executed in the rather extraordinary conditions proposed by the composer. This is music of the out-of-doors, making few demands; it is, nevertheless, a wholesome art through which breathes at intervals the broad popular spirit of the Kermis of Teniers. Benoit will never be an international figure but his memory will probably survive, because, like Grieg, Smetana and Dvorak, he once embodied the deepest aspiration of his countrymen.

Of the same generation are three musicians whose influence has been greater through their activities than through their actual compositions.

The works of *Adolphe Samuel* (Liège 1824—Ghent 1898) are fairly extensive, but his hybrid inspiration has not been able to stand up against the ravages of time. Worthy of mention, however, is his oratorio, "Christus," which had innumerable performances,



*Peter Benoit*

especially in Germany, where for a time it enjoyed a vogue comparable to that of the Brahms Requiem and the great Mendelssohn Oratorios. But the influence of Samuel was felt in another field, to which we shall return in connection with the great contemporary musical organizations.

*Edgard Tinel* (Sinay 1854—Brussels 1912) would have been much surprised if he could have foreseen that his name would be recalled more as that of a teacher (for seven years he directed the Lemens Institute at Mechlin, and for four years the Conservatory at Brussels) than because of his enormous musical output. The latter is, moreover, not devoid of merit. "Franciscus," "Godelieve,"

the "Geistliche Gesänge" are the works of a highly gifted musician, but their style is hybrid, their inspiration limited, and the hostility of the composer to any sort of innovation results in a neoclassic idiom in which the influences of Mendelssohn and Brahms are thinly disguised.

To the same generation belongs the composer, *Paul Gilson* (Brussels 1865—) whose eclecticism, investigating spirit, and vast erudition are manifested in several works of unquestioned interest. Very much influenced at the outset by the Russian School, Gilson's art displays a profound knowledge of instrumental craftsmanship; as an orchestrator he has assimilated all the secrets of an evolution going back to Wagner and Liszt and coming down to the truculence of Richard Strauss, the refinements of the French impressionists, and the somewhat lordly economy of Stravinsky. Works like "La Mer," "Francesca da Rimini," "Princesse Rayon de Soleil," and "Les Variations Symphoniques" disclose a rich sonority, a balanced sense of instrumental timbres, a sureness in writing equalled only by the great masters of the orchestra. All this knowledge has been summed up in a brief treatise. "Le Tutti orchestral" which constitutes a necessary complement to the greater ones of Berlioz, Gevaert, Rimsky-Korsakov and Richard Strauss on the subject.

The generation of contemporaries shows perhaps greater originality, but by its very eclecticism forms less of a national school. Musicians like Absil, Fernand Quinet, de Bourguignon, Paul de Maleingrau, Marcel Poot, Shoemaker, René Bernier, André Souris and Chevreuille are worthy contributors to a movement of which men like Bartok, Stravinsky, and Hindemith are the most eminent representatives; they are not so much innovators as adaptors of their own inspiration to the new language invented by their great predecessors. The two most interesting personalities of the group are unquestionably *Jean Absil* and *Fernand Quinet*. Absil (Peruwelz 1893) excels particularly in chamber music; his second quartet and his trio especially are of the first rank. But he is such a sure craftsman that no type of writing is

outside his range of possibility. His choral work is done with spontaneity and skill; his orchestral compositions have body and boldness of effect; his piano concerto, which won the prize at the contest organized by the Queen Elizabeth Foundation in 1938, held the attention of the jury and the public in spite of twenty successive performances—a test which few works could successfully withstand. Robust in its inspiration, sometimes rhapsodical in character, Absil's work is of definite originality, and if certain harsh qualities, certain jarring rhythms may be derived from Bartok, this influence is sufficiently assimilated to offer no violation to the unity of style or to the fundamental adjustment between the inspiration and the means of expression employed.

The musical output of *Fernand Quinet* (Charleroi 1898) is unfortunately very small, the artist's career being interrupted in its prime by a long and serious illness. His special gift is in short compositions of "tabloid" form in which humor and sarcasm mingle with brief effusions interrupted by an abrupt reticence. It is a music full of allusions, in which everything is measured, calculated, gauged to produce exactly the effect desired.

The work of *André Souris* (Marchienne 1899) belongs to the same esthetic order, but in his case the humor is more direct, the allusion less veiled. An individual of the highly cultured type, Souris seems to be the victim of an exaggerated self-criticism. The day that he no longer fears to express himself freely, he will produce works worthy of his true personality. Let us add here that Souris plays an important role in the musical life of Belgium since the war. Founder and animator of the musical "Séminaire" at the Palais des Beaux-Arts, he actually leads the left wing of Belgian composers and performers. His activity is really stupendous and can be compared only to the one displayed by the brothers Hae-saerts (Luc and Paul) in the field of plastic arts.

There is not enough space to dwell upon the qualities of verve that mark the music of Marcel Poot, the craftsmanship of that ex-



cellent "symphonist," Chevreuille, one of the surest hopes of the young school, the mysticism of Maleingrau, the last heir of the Franck traditions, the shy charm of Bernier, whose rather thin refinement is the ransom of an overly-stressed purism, the truculence of Shoemaker, the picturesqueness of Bourguignon whose eclecticism perhaps admits too readily of contradictory styles. All these musicians, who have not yet said their last word, are characterized by a profound faith, an absolute disinterestedness, and an artistic honesty which approaches the over-scrupulous.

Having brought our commentary up to the point where the whole activity of Belgium was abruptly cut short by the German invasion, we can now turn back to another type of activity, for parallel to the manifestations of the national genius in the realm of pure creation, a group of savants were exploring the past, opening new perspectives in musicology, while certain universally known teachers were making contributions to instrumental technique whose traces persist even today.

*François Joseph Fétis* (Mons 1784—Brussels 1871, *François Auguste Gevaert* (Huyse 1828—Brussels 1908), and *Charles van den Borren* (Ixelles 1874—) are merely the heads of a long line including (to cite only the principal names): Van der Straeten (1826-1895)—chief work: "La Musique aux Pays-Bas"; de Burbure (1812-1889); Van Maldeghem (1810-1893)—author of the "Trésor Musical," 29 volumes of XVIth century vocal works; Van Doorslaer—"La Vie et les Oeuvres de Philippe de Monte"; Paul Bergmans—"La Typographie Musicale en Belgique au XVI siècle"; Ernest Closson—"Grétry" and "Chansons Populaires des Provinces Belges."

#### Fétis

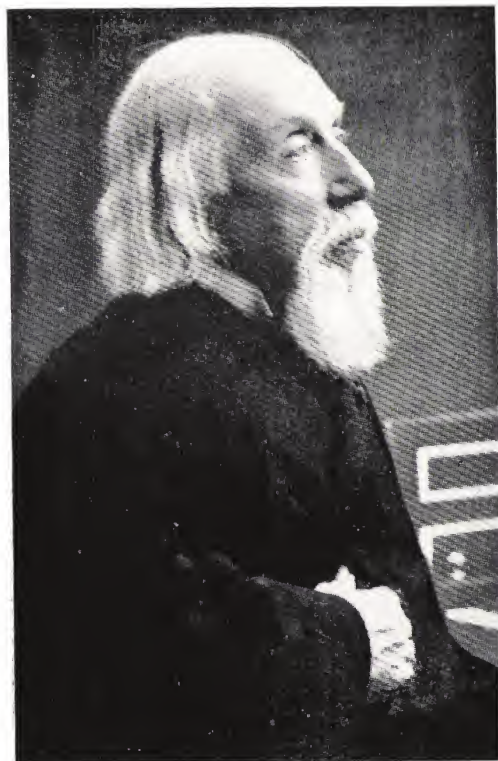
The personality of *Fétis* presents interesting contradictions. Endowed with a vast musical culture, he laid the foundations for all contemporary musicology (but in spite of their value, which remains inestimable, some of his writings reveal a lack of detailed information, and too often reflect the biased and impassioned



*François Joseph Fétis*

temperament of their author). A dogmatism that suffers no contradiction, systematic views leading to syntheses that are interesting but often invalidated by subsequent developments, are perhaps the price to be paid for too bold a spirit, for an intelligence that sees too far along the perspectives it has discovered. None the less, works like the "Traité de Contrepoint et de Fugue" (1824), the "Biographie Universelle des Musiciens," and especially the "Histoire Générale de la Musique" (unfortunately not completed) remain, after more than a century, indispensable reference books for every historian of the art. Moreover, the influence of Fétis went far beyond the realm of erudition. An "animator" before that word was invented, he was too much aware of the wide public he commanded not to attempt the exercise of a more direct influence on his time. Only summary reference can be made here to the immense services he rendered as founder of the "Concerts Historiques" in Paris; as founder of the "Revue Musicale" (1827)—the first important publication devoted to music in France; as Choir Master for King Leopold I, and especially as Director of the Brussels Conservatory, these latter functions exercised by him from the date of foundation (1833) until his death. It is no exaggeration to say that he and his successor, *François Gevaert*, are responsible for the immense prestige which this institution of higher learning has enjoyed in Europe.

*Gevaert*, indeed, possessed exactly the qualities required to complete the work of his predecessor. To him goes the honor of having formed a professional staff unequalled in Europe. Among its members, in the course of a single generation, were: Joseph Dupont (conductor), Lemmens (organ), Servais ('cello), César Thompson and Eugène Ysaye (violin), Van Hout (viola), Arthur de Greef (piano), Jacob ('cello). And he must be credited also with having drafted a study program which has served as a model for the principal schools of other countries. To him we owe, as well, the revival of the great choral works of Bach and Haendel, given exemplary performance after long study and preparation. From a musicological point of view, the work of *Gevaert* dominates the



*François Auguste Gevaert*

close of the XIXth century, by excellence of method, profound erudition, and the opening of fresh perspectives. Such titles as "Origines du Chant Liturgique" (certain hypotheses of which have not, however, been retained), the "Mélopée Antique," the "Traité Général d'Instrumentation" (translated into German by the cele-



brated musicologist, Rieman, and later into Spanish, Russian, and English), the "Problèmes Musicaux d'Aristote"—are sufficient evidence that their author was not only musician and historian, but true humanist, as well.

The writings of *Charles van den Borren* are more limited in scope, since the author preferred to choose a definite field and exhaust all its possibilities: the beginnings of polyphony, the history of English and Belgian music. The "Origines de la Musique de Clavecin en Angleterre," the "Musiciens Belges en Angleterre à l'époque de la Renaissance," the "Débuts de la Musique à Venise," the "Origine et Développement de l'Art Polyphonique Vocal au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle," "Polyphonia Sacra," and his book on Guillaume Dufay, are unsurpassed as works of reference. His material is always first hand, innumerable texts were discovered, analyzed, deciphered, and scored. But what lends the greatest attraction to his writings is the fact that behind all this erudition vibrates the enthusiasm of an artist. It must be added that in 1920 van den Borren succeeded Wotquenne as Curator of the Conservatory Library in Brussels, and in spite of insufficient government appropriation, managed to maintain the high level of this library, one of the richest in Europe.

And since we have already mentioned this famous institution, meeting-place of the world's erudite, we should speak briefly of the collection of instruments to be seen there (Curator: Ernest Closson, then Herman Closson), as it is of an interest unfortunately too little recognized. It possesses notably 13 splendid *Ruckers* harpsichords (the work of the Antwerp instrument-makers of the XVI<sup>th</sup> and XVII<sup>th</sup> centuries), some typical examples of the whole family of wind instruments which we owe to Adolphe Sax (Dinant 1814—Paris 1894), the highly gifted inventor whose discoveries revolutionized the art of instrumentation—and some rare specimens of primitive and foreign instruments. This collection is only equalled in Europe by those of the Paris Conservatory, the Museum of the Berlin Music Conservatory, and the Kensington Museum at London.

To complete this brief survey, we must say something about the great musical interpreters of today, and about the musical organizations which directly influence both the public and the training of future interpreters. Due to the restricted territory of Belgium, musical life is more intense in Brussels than in the provincial towns. Four musical organizations, rivals in excellence, share in a fairly logical distribution of the musical material.

#### Concerts

The *Concerts Populaires de Musique Classique*, founded in 1865 by Adolphe Samuel, have played an outstanding role over a period of 60 years. Directed first by their founder, and thereafter by Vieuxtemps, Joseph Dupont, Sylvain Dupuis, Edouard Brahy, and Franz Ruhlman, the Concerts Populaires initiated the general public of Brussels into the whole classical repertoire. In competition with the *Société des Concerts du Conservatoire* (directed by Désiré Defauw), the "Populaires" merged in 1930 with the Société Philharmonique, founded by Henri le Boeuf, and this happy union gave new impetus to the elder society, before it was absorbed by the newer. From this time on, modern and contemporary composers have occupied a large place on the programs: the masterpieces of Stravinsky, Honneger, Darius Milhaud, Prokofieff, and Markevitch are performed, sometimes in first audition, in conditions of unrivalled perfection. It must be admitted, however, that since the death of its founder, the Philharmonics have, in some measure, lost part of their boldness and try, too often, to follow the moods of the average concertgoers, rather than guide them.

The *Defauw* concerts, due to the individual initiative of the Director, naturally reflect his personal preferences. They specialize in the rendition of the classical, romantic, and impressionist compositions, and have played a capital role in familiarizing the public with the great works of Franck, Lekeu, Fauré, d'Indy, Debussy, Ravel, and Florent Schmitt.

The *Maison d'Art* was founded in 1930 by the writer of these lines. Its field is strictly limited to chamber music (from the sonata



*Désiré Defauw conducting*

to works for small orchestra). Its programs are designed to be eclectic and to initiate the public into a knowledge of the least known works in the pre-classical, classical, and contemporary repertoires. Each performance offers music lovers first hearings of certain compositions, and the repertoire ranges from Pérotin, Léonin, the composers of the French Renaissance through Gabrielli, Telemann, Dowland, Purcell, etc., to moderns like Hindemith, Stravinsky, Bartok, Alban Berg, and Schoenberg. The Defauw concerts as well as the Maison d'Art have not, since the war, been able to resume their activities.

This short survey would be incomplete if a word of praise were not devoted to the excellent work accomplished by the Belgian National Radio Institute (I.N.R. or N.I.R.), and especially by the Flemish section, under the leadership of *Paul Collaer*. There is no doubt that the most interesting performances in Belgium take place in the radio's Concert Hall, designed by the architect Diongre. Due to the great knowledge of Collaer, to his sense of organization, to the prestige which he commands in foreign countries, all the most outstanding compositions of contemporary music are performed without delay under the most favorable conditions, by a well-trained orchestra led by the excellent conductor of the Institute, Franz André.

The method of financing such a costly organization is absolutely different from that practiced in America: the I.N.R. is official and may not receive any private funds, nor accept any paid commercials. However, from taxes levied on the radio sets, the Government can assure the I.N.R. a budget large enough to permit it to accomplish its mission.

All these concerts are given in the concert hall of the Royal Conservatory or in the great auditorium (seating 2200, and recently named *Salle Henri Le Boeuf*) of the *Palais des Beaux-Arts*, a building (construction finished in 1929 according to the plans of architect Victor Horta) which has transformed the life of the capital. All artistic activity since has been centered here. With its forty exhibition rooms, its vast sculpture hall, its two concert chambers, its movie auditorium, the Palais des Beaux-Arts lends itself to artistic displays of a highly varied nature. The organization remains its own free agent, in spite of a theoretical control exercised by the State. The plan which enabled the founders, the late Henri Le Boeuf, and Mayor Adolphe Max, to realize their bold schemes is extremely ingenious and might well serve as an example abroad. The funds necessary for the erection of the building were subscribed by the great financial organizations of the country. The interest and the amortization of the capital, as



well as the operating expenses, were the responsibility of the organization, but they were "guaranteed" by the State which was only to intervene, however, in case the organization found itself unable to meet its obligations. Following amortization of the debt, the building belonged entirely and without question to the organization.

It would be unjust to omit here the work accomplished at Antwerp and Mechlin, respectively, by *Lode de Vocht* and Canon *Van Nuffel*, the first at the head of the choral society, "La Caecilia," which he founded, and the latter as Choir Master of the Collegiate Church of St. Rombaut. The Caecilia has specialized in the execution of great contemporary compositions, and has frequently been invited to other countries to collaborate in the creation of works of Stravinsky, Milhaud, and Honneger. Van Nuffel has devoted his life to the revival of polyphonic works of the XVth and XVIth centuries, and under the imposing arches of one of our finest churches, he gives regular performances, at once meticulous and impassioned, of the masses and motets of Philippe de Monte, Obrecht, and Okeghem.

Somewhat outside this heading, an interesting institution must be mentioned, *La Chapelle de la Reine Elisabeth*, founded as a result of the personal initiative of the Queen. It is situated in a pavillion which was constructed at the border of the Forêt de Soignes and which houses a group of scholars whose general and musical education is rounded out in accordance with a broad and wisely conceived course of study. The Foundation, under the leadership of De Vocht, is destined to play an important role in the artistic progress of the country, since it aims at providing selected "boarders" with a superior education in different fields overlapping the regular programs of the more specialized schools.

#### Chamber Music Groups and Virtuosos

Among the numerous groups devoted to chamber music, we can only mention in this short survey the *Quatuor pro Arte*, so closely

connected with the name of Mrs. Coolidge and the Library of Congress as to be well known to our readers, which, in spite of the death of two of its most eminent members, Alphonse Onnou and Robert Maas, continues its valuable work in the field of contemporary music at the University of Wisconsin; the *Trio de la Cour de Belgique*, founded by one of our most eminent musicians, the pianist *Emile Bosquet*, (violin, Alfred Dubois; 'cello, Maurice Dambois); and a fine group of singers and performers completely devoted to ancient music, *Pro Musica antiqua*, under the leadership of Stafford Cape. These ensembles, along with a number of eminent virtuosos, such as the pianists Marcel Maas and Gazelle; the singers Maurice Wynants, Frédéric Anspach and Maurice de Groote; the violinists Raskin, Gertler, Grumiaux and van Neste; the harpsichordist, Aimée Van de Wiele, pupil of Landowska, have contributed largely to the maintenance of the foreign renown which Belgium enjoys in the field of instrumental technique.

Musical Belgium has clearly remained true to its extraordinary past. Our composers, virtuosos, scholars, and conductors watch vigilantly over a flame which the ruthless invasion has not succeeded in extinguishing.

When the country came back to its real life, when the Concert Hall could again be heated, the foreign performers and conductors allowed to travel freely, the public's greed for music could once more be fully satisfied. Partly because of the creation of "les Jeunesses Musicales," an association initiated in Belgium during the war by Marcel Cuvelier, Director of the Philharmonics, to foster the musical enthusiasm of younger audiences, the different music societies were able to resume their activities with a new momentum.

On the other hand, the countries allied with Belgium in the common struggle against the invaders have, at last, understood the benefit of cultural and artistic exchanges, and by appointing "cultural attachés" they have contributed, in no small measure, in making Belgium and especially Brussels more aware of the main

artistic trends in France, Great Britain, Holland and the U.S.A. As a result, Belgium has “exchanged” more artists, groups and performers in the last three years than it was able to do in the preceding twenty years. This one fact has given to the country a sort of new glamour and points out prophetically that Belgium is ready to play a more efficacious role in the artistic renaissance which is in full swing in the liberated countries in spite of the incertitude and anxiety which still hang so heavily on the people.



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